Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

BILHA BRYANT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is February 23, 1998. This is an interview with Bilha Bryant. It's being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy, and Bilha and I are old friends. Bilha, could you tell me when and where you were born and tell us something about your family?

BRYANT: I was born in Dupnitza, a small town in the foothills of the Rila Mountains in Tsigonian, Bulgaria, in 1934. We lived there until our semi-forced immigration to Israel, four years after the Communists took over.

Q: Tell me about your family in Bulgaria and what you remember,because you were 10 years old, weren't you?

BRYANT: Yes. But I remember quite a bit.

Q: First tell me about your family, what your family was involved in.

BRYANT: My paternal side, Sephardim (Spanish Jews), had lived in Bulgaria since the exile from Spain. The family tried to observe Jewish traditions but knew very little about Jewish religion and did not really practice it regularly. My father was in a profession that was not deemed at the time "Jewish." It involved travel to villages and farms and very close contact with peasants who were all Christians. He was a tobacco grower and exporter. My maternal grandfather, whom I never knew since he died before I was born, was a miller and also dealt with Bulgarian farmers. I do remember my maternal grandmother; tall, slim and beautiful, and rather sad. Rumors were that she was not purely Jewish. After the death of her husband, she was obliged to move in, for periods of 6 month a year, with her two sons and their families. My paternal family was large and close-knit, but not very happy, with a great deal of family feuding. The extreme hierarchy in the family touched all of us, but mostly the women.

Q: I take it there wasn't the equivalent of - I may be mispronouncing this - a shtetl - in Bulgaria, a Jewish enclave, a small village or something like that?

BRYANT: Bulgarian Jews were assimilated into the society and did not stand out as Jews. They didn't speak Yiddish or go to the synagogue, except for the High Holy Days. My own father had a lot of Christian friends from all levels of society. It was not the same sort of Jewish community you saw in Poland or the Ukraine. The old generation spoke Ladino, an ancient form of Spanish from the 14th-century when Queen Isabella kicked the Jews out of Spain.

The separation was mainly economic: poor people lived across the river and very few (before Communism) were able to "cross the bridge." We visited the house I grew up in Dupnitza. We left Bulgaria in November '48 and, as I said, left everything behind. And now, 50 years later, there they were: the same sofa, the same table and chairs, everything as we left it. The family that had taken over the house continued to live there all these years. It was so eerie.

Q: How about schooling?

BRYANT: Jewish children had to attend segregated Jewish elementary schools. Looking back I am not sure why, since we were not taught anything very Jewish, such as the Old Testament or Hebrew and when we reached middle school, Jews and Christians attended the same schools and got along fine.

Q: You say you left there when, about '45 or so?

BRYANT: No, we actually left in November of '48.

Q: Well then, what about Bulgaria during the war years, because Bulgaria was an ally of the Germans, of the Nazis, and of course, everyone knows what the Nazis were doing to Jews? Did this impact on Bulgaria?

BRYANT: Comparatively speaking, Bulgarian Jews were very lucky. The combination of the reluctance of Tzar (King) Boris to allow our deportation, and practically a miracle, saved the Bulgarian Jews from the fate of the rest of the Jews in Europe.

Q: What about your father's business?

BRYANT: According to the new Nazi law - The Law for the Defense of the Nation- Jews were not allowed to own rural property, own or manage a commercial firm, so on. And this is what happened to my father's business. It was taken over by his Christian partner with no compensation whatsoever.

Q: What type of government was there in Bulgaria then?

BRYANT: It was, of course, a monarchy with a pro-Nazi, Fascist government. I don't really remember who the Prime Minister was at the time, but I know that he was closely allied with the Nazis and followed their policies. A new law required that all Jews register, declare all their properties and possessions, and deposit all their money in blocked bank accounts. We were also made to take Jewish names. For example, in my case, I was known as Bili Mosheva but had to delete the "va" and become Bili Moshe. This law also prohibited Jews from voting, holding public office, employing non-Jewish domestic help, a curfew between the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m., and the most devastating of all, all Jewish men between the ages of 20 to 40 were sent to army labor camps.

The same fascist government also agreed to allow the Germans to use Bulgarian railroads to deport Jews from Macedonia, Greece, and Yugoslavia. Dupnitza was on a main railway from Macedonia and I will never forget the cries for help coming from the box cars, always in the middle of the night. We knew they were being sent to concentration camps, but we never imagined what was happening in the camps.

Apparently, Hitler was becoming very angry with the King for refusing to follow with his policy on the "Jewish solution" and for resisting to send Bulgarian forces into Greece. He wanted an urgent face-to-face meeting. The day after the King returned from Germany, he fell ill and died a few days later of undetermined causes. Rumors were that he had been poisoned. I remember watching the train carrying the King's body for burial in the Rila Monastery passing through Dupnitza. Thousands of people were lining the tracks, crying. Jews were crying not only for their protector but also for the fate that will befall them after his death.

Q: Do you remember when that happened?

BRYANT: I am not sure. I think in the summer of 1943.

Q: And then what happened?

BRYANT: Things become worse for us. The Fascist government supported by the King's brother, Cyril, could now freely deport the Sofia Jews to the provincial towns where they had relatives so that they could stay with them and not disrupt the housing market. We seemed to have quite a few relatives who lived in Sofia, because our modest house became a home to about 30 relatives. A family occupied every room in the house, including the living rooms and we all shared three kitchens. Despite the horrible conditions, the lack of food, and the fear of the future, I clearly remember the love and kindness that prevailed in the house, especially towards us children. As it happened, the evacuation spared the Jews from Sofia from the horrific bombing by the British, which caused a great deal of damage and many casualties in the capital.

But then, one beautiful summer day in Dupnitza, something terrible happened; I remember being on our small balcony with my brother and cousins watching the British planes pass over the town (not for the first time), "just like silver birds." We yelled at the top of our voices "Please come and save us, we love you," and then we saw tens of bombs coming down on Dupnitza. Houses, perhaps quarter of a mile way, were hit, dust and smoke raised over the town and screams, which I still remember with horror, were heard all over the town. The bitter irony of it all was that about 40 Jews, living as we did in the same house, were killed. We learned later that Dupnitza was not the actual target but because their original target was impossible to hit, they decided to get rid of the bombs over our town. After the bombing we all ran from our homes at the first sound of the alarm. Dupnitza, being built in a deep valley between high hills, had very few places to hide. One of them was the railway tunnel, which was used as bomb shelter, but Jews were not allowed there. So we hid under trees and bushes and hoped for the best.

Q: How were you following the war news in all this?

BRYANT: BBC transmitted every evening in Bulgarian. As soon as the broadcast started, everyone gathered around the radio and even the little ones sat quietly listening to the news, which if I remember correctly described the battles being fought and later won by the allies. But, in 1942 Jews were ordered to deliver all radio sets to the authorities as part of the "Law for the Defense of the Nation." We all knew that this was only the beginning and got information wherever we could get it.And then, on March 8, 1943 rumors reached our community that the government has agreed to the Germans' demands to deport Bulgarian Jews to concentration camps in Germany. I remember well the terror and the helplessness we all felt, even the children. And indeed on March 9th we were ordered to "pack a small bag with personal belongings for each member of the family, since you may be sent to different locations." I remember that day so well, but not as if it was happening to me, but as if I were watching a movie. While my mother was packing each of us a small bag, tears rolling down her cheeks, my father decided to swallow his pride and go and beg his Christian partner to "please take my children away and hide them with friends in one of the villages." The reply was "I couldn't endanger my family by saving your children. But you know I have always liked the silver candlesticks in your home. You won't need them any longer. Could I have them?"... My father came home heartbroken: this was his friend and his partner of 30 years.

Q: And then what happened?

BRYANT: We gathered in the living room and decided to eat up all the food we had "stashed away for bad times" while we had the opportunity. There was a lot of hugging and crying and all sorts of advice, "in case anyone survives." At 10 a.m. on March 10, which was my birthday, there was a knock on our door and we were told that we were allowed to leave the house and that our deportation has been postponed. I didn't remember that myself, but my parents told me that there was another attempt to deport the Bulgarian Jews, but this time "a miracle" happened. Trains were otherwise engaged in transporting soldiers and ammunition to the front.

By the way, not one Bulgarian Jew was sent to the death camps. There are a lot of conflicting stories about Boris, but the fact remains that he had the courage to stand up to Hitler and to refuse our deportation. I honestly think that without King Boris and his supporters, the Bulgarian Jews would have been doomed.

Q: Well now, there was this peculiar thing that Bulgaria never declared war on the United States, I think. Wasn't that it?

BRYANT: Indeed, and it is even stranger that Bulgaria never declared war on the Soviet UnionApparently, when the war broke out, Bulgaria wanted to keep its neutrality, but Hitler didn't like that a bit and pressured King Boris to join the pact between Japan, Italy, and Germany. The King refused, but when Germany offered to return to Bulgaria territories lost during the First World War, he agreed that his country would become only a passive ally to the Germans. But, Bulgaria became an ally all the same.

Q: As a Bulgarian, how did you look upon the United States?

BRYANT: As Bulgarian Jews we were praying for America and England to win the war and save us. They were like gods to us; I remember it so well. I seem to have known a lot about the United States, but I honestly don't know how.

Q: Weren't there movies? This was a sort of common culture throughouall of Europe. Gary Cooper and...

BRYANT: Yes, you are right. We did go to movies at every opportunity. The good, handsome American men in the movies symbolized for us decency and heroism. Bulgarian Jews worshiped Roosevelt himself. So it was especially painful to me to read his letters in the Holocaust Museum about the "low priority for the United States on saving the European Jews."

Q: What about the end of the war when the Soviet army came? Did thaimpact on you all?

BRYANT: Very much so. Bulgarians in general and the Jews in particular, received the Soviet soldiers as Bulgaria's saviors. In fact, there were many Jewish partisans that fought side by side with the Soviets. Later on, many of them became Communist Party leaders.

With time, the general situation in the country further deteriorated. Bulgaria was always considered as "the fruit and vegetable garden of the Balkans." But just after a year of the Communist regime, there was no fruit or vegetables to be had. The main reason was that everything was being sent to the Soviet Union. Another reason was that the farmers of the newly established "collective farms" were paid so poorly, that they had no incentive to produce more for the domestic market.

Politically, the worsening situation had a great impact on my own family as well. The new government blamed "the rich" for exploiting the proletariat. The authorities began getting involved in my father's business and looking for reasons to intimidate him. Not long after that, his business was nationalized. In school, children were indoctrinated into the Communist Youth Party and encouraged to report on anyone who spoke against the regime, including family members.

Q: You were how old? Let's see...'34, they came about '44. Let's saabout 10.

BRYANT: About 10. Old enough. And I was fascinated by communism and became a very devoted little Pioneer girl. The communists gave me the opportunity to get involved in writing and the theater. I was in seventh heaven and my parents were horrified.

Q: You had a red kerchief and...

BRYANT: I wore a uniform, too. I was asked to read poems and write speeches on Stalin, Dimitrov, and the great promises of communism.

Q: Did thing change at all around '48, when Yugoslavia decided to break away? Did you feel any impact of that?

BRYANT: I remember the many Yugoslav children coming to Bulgaria as youth exchange. And then one day, they were no longer our "brothers and sisters." But there was no other impact that I remember.

Life had become unbearable for my parents. They worried that my father could be arrested at any time and that, God forbid, I might become a real communist. At that point they started exploring the possibility of leaving Bulgaria. As a first step, they arranged that my brother, then 15, leave Bulgaria for Palestine, with a group of 40 Jewish boys and girls. They left Bulgaria via Turkey and Syria. The trip took over two months because of all sorts of border crossing difficulties.

Q: Was this a legal thing?

BRYANT: It was legal, both leaving Bulgaria and entering Palestine,but I don't know the details.

Q: Were you a part of this group?

BRYANT: No, my brother was.

Q: This was when, about '46, '47.

BRYANT: In '46. It was before Israel's Independence. So he went. He was only 15 years old and the family missed him terribly. But we knew that his departure would be the impetus for us all to join him in Palestine. When in May of 1948 Israel was declared independent, "shlichim" (emissaries) came to Bulgaria to encourage Jews to immigrate to Israel. My parents and many of their friends from Dupnitza decided to go. We had to leave everything behind - we only took what we could carry. And I never went back to Bulgaria until 1997 when I visited there with my husband and brother and his wife.

We visited the house I grew up in in Dupnitza. We left Bulgaria in November '48 and, as I said, left everything behind. And now, 50 years later, there they were: the same sofa, the same table and chairs, everything as we left it. The communist family that had taken over the house continued to live there all these years. It was so eerie.

And so, all the Jews that were leaving for Israel gathered in the Central Synagogue in Sofia, carrying our measly possessions. The Israeli emissaries had arranged to take us by train to Rijeka and then on ships to Haifa.

Q: That's interesting. How did you get to Rijeka? The reason I say this is that around this time the Yugoslavs were going through this break with the Soviets, and Rijeka, of course, being a Yugoslav port?

BRYANT: The Yugoslavs were quite friendly to Israel and I am sure they were paid handsomely to let us through. But let me tell you, it was certainly not a pleasure trip. We "traveled" by train in cattle cars - about 50 people to a car - from Sofia all the way to Rijeka. That's a long way, with no toilets, no water - it was just horrible. And then from Rijeka we got on an old, beaten-up cargo ship. We had to stay in the hold and sleep on the shelves that were meant for cargo. It was really quite bad, but you know, one survives these things.

Q: What was it like getting there? By that time you were a younteenage girl. You were about 14 or so.

BRYANT: That's right. The terrible thing was that I knew very little about Jewish religion or Zionism. I also new very little about Israel. When we first arrived, we were placed in a large British former campsite - the British had just left Israel - for a few weeks until we knew what next. We were housed in a large barrack with about 30 other families. We were given a little money for food. I remember that for the first time in my life I was actually hungry.

My brother had left the kibbutz and was able to get a job and a room for us in Haifa and he suggested that we all move there. And so we did. My father came to Israel with nothing except a few Turkish gold coins - I still have one as a souvenir - but he had nothing else. At the age of 46 he had to start all over again, without language, profession, or money. The only work available at that time in Haifa was in the port as a stevedore. My father was a slight and slender man, not strong enough for this sort of work. So he would come home without having found work or earned any money. It was really very sad.

The only thing that helped us survive these difficult times was the love and the wonderful sense of humor my family had. My father loved his drink. When we lived in Bulgaria, he used to make his own wine and slivovitz. In Israel, the village of Zikhron Ya'aqov had a very large winery - even then they were making wines in Israel. So one day my father finally got a job, from all places in the winery, filling up bottles of wine; the perfect job for him and a wonderful joke for the family. So he finally started making a little money. I remember well when he first got his wages, he brought home fresh bread and cheese and I was the happiest girl in Israel.

Q: So here you are, prime material for learning about new countries. You've already been a young Pioneer and you've learned the glories of the Soviet Union, and you're a good student. You're ready to pick up the glories of Israel.

BRYANT: And I did. Obviously, I did because at the end I had became an Israeli army officer and later an Israeli diplomat. Yet somehow I always felt different. Perhaps I was too tall to be an Israeli...

Q: You are how tall?

BRYANT: Well, I'm 5'9" now. And I was almost as tall when I was 15. Too tall compared to other girls that age. I was also too skinny. Israeli girls at the time use to wear bloomers; you might have seen them in photographs. And of course, being tall with skinny legs, I looked horrible in bloomers. Also I was very shy, though shy is not the right description of me then and now. I was very insecure. And so my father decided, since he had no money to send me to a proper school, why not accept the suggestion of the immigration authorities to send me to a kibbutz with a group of Bulgarian children my age. And that's what I did. I was sent at the age of 14 to Ein Harod, which was one of the nicest old kibbutzim in the valley of Yisrael, where I joined another 40 Bulgarian boys and girls.

Q: Were you speaking Ladino at this time?

BRYANT: No, Bulgarian. I never learned Ladino.

Q: But you said you didn't know Hebrew. There was no Hebrew oanything?

BRYANT: No, we didn't speak or understand Hebrew. We spoke Bulgariaamong us.

Q: You must have been somewhat isolated from most of the Israelis.

BRYANT: Yes, because most of the people in Israel, and in the kibbutzim, had come from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and spoke Yiddish, so we were Europeans but did not speak Yiddish, which made us an oddity. In the kibbutz we lived in wooden cottages, 10 children to a cottage. We worked in the morning in the fields and we went to school in the afternoon where we were taught Hebrew, Jewish history and all other subjects related both to Israel and to the world. It actually was a very good curriculum under the circumstances. I remember working in the vegetable gardens, the vineyards and the grapefruit groves and most of the time enjoying it.

Q: Well, the kibbutzim were coming out of, you might say, the socialist left wing, not the religious side, so you weren't really picking up the religion.

BRYANT: Unfortunately not. We were taught the Bible, but as part of history, not religion. Great emphasis was put on Hebrew and Israel's recent history. The "kibbutzniks" themselves were atheists.

Q: How about your brother, who had come before you?

BRYANT: When we arrived to Israel my brother was still in a kibbutz. He had fought during the war in the Palmach-I don't know if you have heard of it-this is the very small, select army of young men and women from Kibbutzim. He was all of 16 when he went to fight. He left the kibbutz and found a job in Haifa to help my parents settle down. Having left the kibbutz with no profession fit for the city, my brother found work with the railroads. He became an engineer for the Israel's new railroads. This was very hard and dirty work, but he did that for a while and helped the family a great deal.

Q: By this time you were what, around 16?

BRYANT: 16.

Q: How did you find the kibbutz society?

BRYANT: Very, very nice. Some of my best memories of Israel were from the kibbutz. And I'm talking about a different era in the kibbutz. At the time I was in Ein Harod, people in the kibbutz worked very hard to sustain themselves and help youth groups such as ours. They worked in the fields during the day and in the evenings, after dinner in the communal dining room, we all gathered to read poetry, discuss the current situation in the country and the world and most importantly play the accordion and dance folk dances. It was such a beautiful, beautiful existence. The kibbutz children did not live with their parents and we all worked together. I think the existence of the kibbutz at that time was really why Israel actually exists today.

Q: Well it was really coming out of the European socialist experience. Sort of the intellectuals put it together, and it was probably the only time it worked anywhere.

BRYANT: Right, and it really worked. It's amazing, because there were no squabbles about "he got that and she got that," and people actually liked each other. I am very glad to have had this experience.

I stayed in Ein Harod for two years and was quite happy there. But I missed my family and had to move on. My parents and brother worked very hard to ensure some sort of financial future and I knew I had to help; I needed to get a job and I also needed to continue my education, and I was only 16.

So when I returned to Haifa, I enrolled in high school where I also learned accounting, typing and shorthand. Bear in mind we are talking about typing and shorthand in Hebrew. I had just learned the language, but I needed to learn a profession so that I could work during the day and go to school at night. And indeed, I learned. And one day, I overheard the school director recommending someone for a job and saying: "You'll be very happy with her. She is smart, hard working and reliable." I, of course, assumed he was recommending someone else. A few minutes later I was called to the Director's office and introduced to a very distinguished looking gentleman who was recruiting his first clerk for an American-Israeli automotive plant that was being established in Haifa. The American firm Kaiser-Fraser had just signed an agreement with an Israeli company to assemble American cars in Israel. A lot had to be done administratively before building the plant. The gentleman, Mr. Berman, needed somebody to work for him, and here I was. He looked me over and he said, "Well, you look very young, but you must be good since the director says you can do anything." With great trepidation I started working for this man. He was patient and kind and he taught me a great deal. He really did and I shall forever be grateful to him. At night after a long and stressful day in the office, I went to school.

When the factory was completed, Mr. Berman and I moved to our new offices and started recruiting other employees. By that time, I was considered a "senior employee" at 16. I worked hard and climbed up the ladder to being the secretary of the chairman. Kaiser-Ilin was very good to me and I learned there not only to be a good secretary, but also to become more conscious of the world outside of Israel.

As you may know, at the age of 18 all Israelis are required by law to enlist in the Army. So when I reached 18, I too had to enlist. After the 4-week basic training, I was sent to a Military Intelligence Officers Course for six exhausting months at the end of which I was assigned to the Mixed Armistice Commission with Syria and Lebanon. As it happened, this was the beginning of my diplomatic experience.

Q: What was the Mixed Armistice Commission in those days. We'rtalking about 1950-ish, aren't we?

BRYANT: Well, '53 or '54. Representatives from the Israeli and Syrian or Lebanese military would meet once a week to discuss border incidents; it could be as minor as a donkey crossing the border, or something serious such as kidnaping across the border or shooting at working farmers. Of course, United Nations officers also participated. Eight to 10 people usually attended the meetings, not more than that, depending on the seriousness of the incident. Not much was happening on border with Lebanon, but there was always something going on with the Syrians.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

BRYANT: At that point the Syrians were sitting high up on the Golan Heights and were shooting at Israeli farmers, or fishermen on the Kinneret (Lake Tiberias). Both my superiors were high-ranking officers conducted the discussions. I was only a second lieutenant and my job was to sit quietly and take notes of the proceedings and then follow up.

Q: How were these meeting at that time there with the Syrians?

BRYANT: The meetings were very civilized. There was no social chatter and exchange of jokes, but at the same time there was no hostility as such. I think the hatred came later on when the Arabs started losing part of their territories. The Syrians, as you know, lost the Golan Heights.

Q: I was thinking-there was the 1948 War; the next one was '57, wait?

BRYANT: '56.

Q: So the '56 war would be the Suez War?

BRYANT: The Suez War. As soon as the war broke out, I, like thousands other Israelis, was mobilized. I was assigned to the Public Affairs Office of the Israeli Army, specifically, to escort foreign journalists who were reporting on the war. A very interesting thing happened then; if you remember, the Israeli army was moving very fast across the Negev. So there we were, riding across the desert in a convoy of buses following the conquering army. At one point we lost track of the army but were able to continue by following the hundreds of shoes and boots left behind in the desert by the retreating Arab forces. Actually, I found that to be a very sad sight. Finally we did get to Sharm el Sheikh.

Q: Which is the port on the Gulf of Aqaba.

BRYANT: Yes, but we got there before the Israeli tanks got there. I was terrified, I must admit. Everything seemed eerily quiet. Apparently, the Arabs had already left, so there was no danger to us, but let me tell you, I wouldn't like to go through that experience again.

Q: Had you run into any Americans by this time or had any feel foAmerica?

BRYANT: During my stint in the Army I met, and in fact become friendly with two U.S. Air Force officers. I was not a good judge of character at that time, but I thought the colonel as very worldly and interesting. The major, on the other hand, was charming but basic. He knew very little about the Middle East and what was happening there.

Q: Well, the Air Force, you know, of the services, didn't get arounmuch in those days. They flew airplanes.

BRYANT: During that time, I met and worked briefly for General Moshe Dayan, who was then the Northern Commander. He was dangerously flirtatious, but delightful. He came often to our office on the shores of Lake Tiberias and would always bring a flower and compliment me, and then concentrate on the "business" part of his visit. I was really smitten by him: he was good looking, charming and extremely intelligent. He just filled up the room when he walked in, he really did.

Later on I also met Chaim Herzog, who was at the time the Commander of Military Intelligence and later, as you may know, became President of Israel. In Israel after completion of your military service, you remain in semi-active duty and can be called back at any time of need. I was well known in military circles as a good and efficient worker. So whenever the intelligence service needed help, they would call me, "Bilha, we need you here," and off I'd go.

Q: You were back at Kaiser?

BRYANT: Yes. I would serve in the reserves for a few weeks at a time and mostly enjoy the challenge and the change, but it got to the point that I could not afford it; after a while Kaiser-Ilin stopped paying my full salary and the Army was certainly not paying much. This is when I actually met Chaim Herzog, worked for him and we became very good friends.

Q: Had things changed at all after the '56 war?

BRYANT: No, they hadn't. Perhaps at first the glory of victory helped morale in the country, but it also brought a new and horrific factor to everyday life - terrorism. While I haven't lived there for over 35 years, I still remember well the horrors of terrorism for the ordinary Israeli. I still get upset at the thought that the Arabs lost the Suez war fair and square and that the only way they could stand up to Israel was by killing and maiming innocent people, including small children.

Q: Now Bilha, what was your father doing in this time now? Did hbegin to sort of make his way in Israel?

BRYANT: Both my parents were working very hard. They had rented a small shop in downtown Haifa where they sold fruit and vegetables and also served sandwiches, coffee, tea and cold drinks to adjoining offices. My brother and I realized how hard it was for them to be doing that; they did not speak Hebrew and they felt degraded doing that sort of work. Both my brother and I spend any free time helping them in the shop.

We all lived together in a house we shared with a nice Arab family: they had the first floor and we lived on half of the second floor sharing it with a Polish religious couple. We were a closely-knit family so that even when I was in Tiberias, I made an effort to come home as often as possible.

Despite the difficult times, we somehow managed to remain happy. There was a lot of laughter and joy in our small apartment in Haifa. And then one night, while my brother and I were out to the theater, my father was taken to the hospital. It was late at night, the buses were not running and we had no money for taxi. Instead, we ran the three miles to the hospital and learned that my father had had a severe heart attack, but that he had survived. After his return from the hospital he had another attack and died at home. He was relatively young man; he was only in his 50s.

Q: Yes, very difficult.

BRYANT: Can you imagine, at the age of 45, you leave behind everything you have worked for all your life and start again with nothing? We could and did overcome poverty, but my father's early death was devastating to us. It was especially traumatic for my mother, who at the age of 44, and under such difficult circumstances became a widow.

And here is where the Bulgarian influence showed its face: While my father was alive, my brother and his new wife and baby lived in my parents' apartment. But as soon as my father died, the situation was reversed and mother and I found ourselves living in my brother's apartment... This is how things work in this part of the world; women use to have very few rights. My brother is a wonderful loving man and he took the responsibility kindly. My mother did not remarry and continued to live with my brother's family in Israel until her death. But, to my delight, after my marriage to Ted she also spent a few happy years with us in many overseas posts. She was a wonderful company for our three daughters and great European influence on their upbringing. She is dead now.

Q: How did you find, as a young woman, sort of moving up and in the upper circles, in a way, through talent, Israel? I've heard it's very lively society-lots of debating, very vibrant political life. Did you get involved in that at all?

BRYANT: Very much so. As I said earlier, I never felt as if I belonged in Israel. Yet I knew that since I had to continue to live there, I had to do the best I can with what I had. And so I did. I had an interesting group of friends in the theater, and in the arts. I traveled often to Zfat, an old city in the north of Israel, which had become an artists' colony. I knew a number of the artists and had a great deal of fun with them. Between a full time job, and night school, there was very little time left for socializing. I knew that something had to go and that it could not be my job, so I gave up my college education. I have always regretted the decision... In the meantime, through hard work and determination, my job in Kaiser-Ilin had become more demanding, requiring travel and long days and nights in the office; In fact, it had become a very exciting job and I thrived on it.

Q: What were you doing?

BRYANT: Well, I was the assistant to the Chairman of the company, which involved preparing administratively everything he needed or might need to perform his job. I handled all his Hebrew correspondence, attended his meetings and took down the minutes-really, everything. I also traveled with him on business trips.

By the way, while working at Kaiser-Ilin I met Eleanor Roosevelt during her visit to Israel, and to our factory, and in fact, have a photograph of myself presenting her with bouquet of flowers. I also had the opportunity to meet many American businessmen, including Soapy Williams, who later became Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and found them very friendly.

Q: I would think in those times everything was so loose and people coming in and all that degrees did not have the quite same meaning that they would have in a more stable time when there's sort of a track. I mean, you had people like yourself, I mean, coming in and sort of moving ahead without these formal degrees - and frankly, a lot of time was wasted.

BRYANT: It's true, you know. I never thought about it that way. One of the things I regret very much is that I never got a degree, but here I was, a young woman from another world really making it in Israel.

One day while at work, I received a telephone call from one of the top officials in the Israeli Foreign Ministry who had known me when I was with the Mixed Armistice Commission. He told me that the Ministry had a number of positions in the Foreign Service; would I like to join the Service. The first thing I thought was: "how could I join? I don't even have a degree." But they didn't even ask me about that. They had known my work. I discussed the offer with my family who encouraged me to go ahead and see how I like it. The exams and training took place in Jerusalem, and lo and behold, six months later, I was offered a choice of two posts; one in Johannesburg as a vice-consul and the other in The Hague as a cultural attachï¿½, which sounded a little more interesting for me. Besides, South Africa seemed so far away. And so I accepted the one in Holland.

Q: Can you describe the Israeli Foreign Service in those days? We're talking about what, '57, no, 1960?

BRYANT: I joined in 1959 and arrived to The Hague in January of 1960. The Career Israeli Foreign Ministry had been established not too long before. It was a very small selective group of people mostly from academia and the military. They were well educated, many of them in England or the United States, they spoke languages, were involved and enthusiastic and very smart. The whole of the European division at that time had a staff of about 15, perhaps less. In The Hague embassy, there was the Ambassador, a distinguished Dutch Jew who had lived in Holland before the war. He spoke many languages, but his Hebrew left much to be desired. There was the DCM [deputy chief of mission], an economic counselor, political officer and myself, and that was it. That was the embassy in Holland. And there were so many official visits! When we were in Holland, Ben Gurion came for a visit. You can imagine an American embassy during a President's visit. Here we were, four people; and here he is, Ben Gurion with a large entourage and a lot of demands. The Dutch at that time loved Israel, which made my job so easy. It was not hard to convince the journalists to write good things about Israel. They were so fascinated by the country.

Q: Did you have a lot of Dutch young people going to Israel to thkibbutzim?

BRYANT: Many young Dutch Jews would go to Israel but only for about six months or so. We found the Jews of Holland, the ones that survived the Holocaust, very much like the rest of the Dutch people; honest, decent and always very helpful to the embassy, with money and any other way.

Q: You were there from 1960-

BRYANT: 1960 to 1963. And I remember so well how I met my future husband. My husband Ted Bryant had been a vice-consul in Haifa and lived about three blocks away from where I lived. But since I am younger, I never met him socially in Haifa. On hearing that was being posted to The Hague, a friend in Kaiser-Ilin who used to see him socially in Haifa, suggested that I look up Ted Bryant who was then at the American Embassy in Holland and say "Hi." He could introduce you to young people there. But when I got to Holland I was really overwhelmed. I was worried and scared and excited all at the same time. I was really alone for the first time in my life, and I was too nervous to call him, so I never did. And one day, my ambassador, whose wife was not very social, invited me to accompany him to the "Yakharche Day" celebration. (Flag Day in Dutch). The celebration took place on fishing boats going out for the first herring. Many diplomats are invited and, according to the Ambassador, it usually is great fun. I of course accepted. It was a cold, rough day, and the seas were high, and the wind was blowing hard and yet I found the outing very exciting. I met quite a few friendly and fascinating people. Among them was a lovely Mexican girl who was also a diplomat, and several good looking Australians. And then I met a beautiful Dutch baroness, who was very kind to introduce me to her "man," Ted Bryant. And so we started talking. And I asked, "Were you in Israel?" And he said, yes, he was and oh, how pleased he was to meet me and, of course, "we must get together." And that was the last I heard from Ted Bryant. Weeks later, my ambassador asked me again to go with him to the annual dance at the Club du Jeudi dance since his wife could not go. This invitation was much more difficult for me to accept since I was very poor and couldn't afford to buy an evening dress. I was making very little money, but I did buy a dress. I don't think I ate for about for two weeks. And when we got there, there was a Paul Jones dance.

Q: Oh, yes. This is where you hold hands and sort of snake througand then at a certain point-

BRYANT: Yes, and when you stop the man who stands across from you would be your partner until the music stops. The first man who was across from me was a small dark man, and, you know, I was young and quite attractive. And so he sort of put his arms around me and started dancing, and said, "From where are your beautiful eyes?" And I said, "From Haifa." And I could feel his hands loosening. Well, apparently, he was the Egyptian Ambassador. When the music stopped next, my partner was a gentleman with one arm, who was the German attachï¿½. And you know the war was still fresh in my mind, so I wasn't happy. I thought to myself, "such a waste of a dress!" Here I was dancing with an Egyptian and a German. My third partner was a good looking clean cut man who promptly started speaking French to me, saying: "Oh, je suis Belge." And so we started talking, and he asked me where I was from. When I said Haifa his eyes lit up and he remembered me. And we re-met, and that was the beginning of our romance.

Q: So '60-'63 was the only time you were in the Israeli ForeigService.

BRYANT: Yes, and I remember an Israeli assistant secretary of the Foreign Service saying to me when I announced my resignation: "We don't need women in the Foreign Service. If they're attractive, they get married in two or three years. And if they're not attractive, they stay there and become mean and frustrated." He was horrible.

Q: Well, now we're in a much more equal situation, but there really was a problem in foreign services all over. Up until very recently, when a woman officer got married, often to a foreigner, more or less, she was expected to do resign, so it meant that your investment was sort of down the tube. So I mean, it was not just a prejudicial thing; there was a practicality: do you hire somebody who was not going to hang around very long?

Well, these interviews are sort of focused on your time dealing with foreign affairs, but I think we might as well, because later on we're going to talk about your time in the Department of State, talk about your time as a Foreign Service wife. When did you get married?

BRYANT: That's another interesting part of my life. We got engaged in February of 1963, but Ted wrote to say that he could not marry me without prior approval from the State Department. He asked that I make an appointment with the Political Counselor at the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, who by the way was an old colleague of Ted's. I was quite nervous about the whole procedure; for one thing I had been in the Military Intelligence Service, as well as in the Israeli Foreign Service. Nobody believed I was actually a diplomat but thought I was in the Shin Beth (the Israeli FBI), which I really wasn't. After my very pleasant interview with the Political Counselor, I had to meet with the Consular Officer, who looked me over carefully and asked a lot of questions. I had the distinct feeling that he was judging my manners. And then, of course, the security clearance took a while. Finally in May '63 Ted got permission to marry me and in June of 1963 I arrived to the States. We were married in St. Thomas Church in Washington, DC on June 29.

Q: What happened then? Where was your and Ted's first assignment?

BRYANT: Ted was in African Affairs. Now bear in mind that this was 1963, Kennedy was President and Africa was very prominent in American politics. Soapy Williams was assistant secretary of state for African Affairs. FSOs and wives were asked to attend by-weekly get-togethers with African Embassies' staff where Soapy Williams called and we all danced square dances. We had wonderfully close relations with Ted's colleagues. In fact, people we met in African Affairs are still our very dear friends, like Tony Ross. I loved it, I really did. According to regulations, I had to remain in the U.S. for three years to qualify for an overseas posting as a diplomat's wife.

Q: -and be an American citizen-

BRYANT: And I became an American citizen. During these three years in Washington we had two daughters. So I was sort of busy. Even so, I was very involved in Ted's life; enjoyed his friends and colleagues and made new friends. And then our first posting was Mozambique.

Q: And that was Portuguese.

BRYANT: Portuguese East Africa.

Q: And you were there from?

BRYANT: From 67 to 69.

Q: And what was Ted doing there?

BRYANT: He was the deputy principal officer. That was probably one of the worst experiences I have had in my life. Not as a post. Mozambique was a beautiful place. Lourenï¿½o Marques was lovely, just lovely. But both the consul general and his wife were from Oklahoma and they didn't know what to make of me, they really didn't. Perhaps my foreign accent sounded suspicious to them. I was friendly, happy, and I entertained beautifully, and they definitely didn't like me or trust me. I have a very interesting story to tell about that. We did not have super markets in Lourenï¿½o Marques where we could buy food for parties and things like that. A few of us wives would get together and make the three-hour trip to Nieuwspraat in South Africa, just on the border and either we would drive ourselves or have a consulate car take us. This particular trip was for the Fourth of July party at the Consulate General's residence. We took an office car and driver and went to do the shopping for the party, including a number of turkeys from the local butcher. When we came back, they dropped us off and took all the turkeyabout six or seven of theto the consul general's residence. About 9 o'clock that evening, the telephone rang. The administrative officer was calling to tell me that a turkey was missing and to ask me if I had taken it. When I said that I had not, he insisted: "Bilha, you must have taken the turkey. The Consul General asked that we come and check in your house." I said, "You can come and check," but I was in tears, I can tell you. They came and of course, they didn't find the turkey. But the next day they did find out that in fact two turkeys were left behind because the butcher had forgotten them in the freezer. And that was that, no apologies. So you can see this incident did not make me happy and not very confident about my future in the U.S. Foreign Service. The Consul General must have been intelligent, but you couldn't' tell. Perhaps being in charge for the first time in his life did something to him. He had a dog, and we all had to go once a week and play with the dog. And whenever they entertained, and some of us attended their dinners, one of our duties was to entertain the dog for 10 to 15 minutes. I mean during a dinner party; people were talking and you had to throw this stupid ball to the dog. It was incredible how they got away with such behavior.

Q: You wonder how people can do it.

BRYANT: But they do. And every time he left the Post, he gave written instructions to the administrative officer and all of us about our "dog's duties: "Bill will come at eight o'clock in the morning and give him some grapes; June will come at ten and give him his biscuit," etc. It was really, very difficult to respect a man like that. Mozambique was a very delightful place to live, and all the Portuguese and Africans we met there were very, nice people. It's too bad that relations in the Consulate General were not happier.

Q: Did you have much contact with what one would today call the "natives." It's a pejorative term, but you had the Portuguese who were settled there, and those who were of African ancestry, who were basically sort of kept apart, weren't they?

BRYANT: The truth is that we did not meet Mozambican Africans socially. I remember a famous African artist, -I don't remember his name-who was very popular with the European diplomatic community. He was one of the few Africans we could invite, so we all fought over him. We did know well and socialized with the "native" Portuguese, mostly government officials, and businessmen. I remember vividly the visit to Mozambique of Sam Westerfield, a deputy assistant secretary for African Affairs, who was a good friend from our stint in Washington. Sam was black and was especially interested in meeting Africans. So we had a party for him and of course invited our one and only African, the artist. When Sam Westerfield walked into our house, our wonderful "houseboy" Ricardo opened the door for him, and Sam shook his hand and introduced himself. Then he walked into our kitchen and shook hands with the rest of the staff. They stood there quite taken aback, and told me, "Madam, it's not acceptable to us for somebody to come and shake our hands while we are working."

There were quite a few black shop attendants. Where else did we sethem? -tailors and shoemakers, people like that.

They seemed happy, at least in Lourenï¿½o Marques. We didn't feel that they were badly treated, because the Portuguese really accept color, much more than any other European nation. What they lacked is the possibility of a good education. The Portuguese made a big mistake in their policies with the Africans. Mozambique could have been a prosperous and happier country for the Portuguese remaining there, had they provided an education for the Africans. But otherwise we did not see much poverty.

Q: Was there any revolt going on out in the hinterlands?

BRYANT: Yes, at that time already the revolt had started, but Lourenï¿½o Marques itself was not affected. You could not tell. We heard about things happening out there. In fact, we traveled a great deal, but we were never worried. I loved the Mozambique Africans; they are happy, gregarious, friendly and smart people. They were my favorite Africans, and I've known quite a few Africans. By the way, when Mozambique became independent at least one of the people who worked for us became a government official.

Q: In '69 you went where?

BRYANT: By that time we all spoke Portuguese, so as a natural progression we were told that our next assignment would be Sï¿½o Paolo and that Ted was going to be Consul General there. At that time we still had only two little girls, and they both spoke Portuguese since they went to a Portuguese nursery school. I started telling the girls about Brazil and about Sï¿½o Paolo. I was very excited myself since I had uncles and cousins there who had left Bulgaria for Brazil. We left Mozambique and took our home leave with my husband's family in Rockport, Massachusetts. The basic mistake was leaving our telephone number with the Department because few days into our home leave Ted was informed that the Consul General had decided to extend for a year so would we like to go to a place called Ethiopia? And at that time you didn't really have much choice in the Foreign Service except hang around Washington. So in September of '69, we arrived in Addis Ababa. But our household effects went to Sao Paolo.

Q: This was Addis Ababa. You were '69 to when there?

BRYANT: '69 to '72.

Q: What was life like in Ethiopia at that time?

BRYANT: Fascinating. It was the most exciting place I've ever been. Addis Ababa was not a city; it was a combination of small villages with dirt roads between them, with cows and sheep on the roads and with people dressed in beautiful white-I forget what they call those-

Q: -like togas-

BRYANT: Like togas. And it was just like living back in the 15th or 16th century. The Ethiopians are very nice, and their women beautiful, with big eyes and lovely smiles. When the Emperor left the palace on the way to his office, usually twice a day, everybody on the road would bow, including diplomats-well, not I. There were quite a few Italians in Addis Ababa, mostly industrialists. The Armenian community was quite large; they ran most of the super markets in town, as well as being the official jewelers to the court. We did get to know socially some of the Ethiopian princes and princesses, and were very close friends with a number of the ministers. I know it doesn't sound like it, but we all enjoyed Ethiopia very much. Ted traveled extensively, climbed mountains, and I was busy with the American Women's Club where I was in charge of publishing the yearly diary. I was also busy having another baby, so for me, it was a little more difficult to travel.

Q: I don't imagine there was any Israeli representation iMozambique, but in Ethiopia there was-

BRYANT: In Ethiopia there was quite a large presence of Israelis.

Q: -because there were close ties with that country.

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: How did the Israelis treat you?

BRYANT: The Israelis treated me all right, but the Americans were not too happy about my being friendly with them. It appeared that our ambassador-Ambassador Hall-was upset after Ted and I attended a dinner at the Israeli Ambassador's residence. Instead of telling Ted or me, he mentioned his unhappiness about it to somebody else, who in turn mentioned it to someone else, when it finally reached us as nasty gossip. The Ambassador should have realized that I no longer considered myself an Israeli; the fact was that I married an American, not an Israeli and to top it all, I married a non-Jew. I was happy to dedicate my time to the US Embassy and did and we had three children who were not being brought up Jewish. I had friendly relations with the Israeli Embassy in the same way I was friendly with the Greek Embassy or any other embassy in Addis. So because of the Ambassador's feelings, I didn't see the Israelis after that any more. In fact, it was sad because the Israeli Ambassador to Ethiopia at that time was a former naval officer whom I knew from my days in the United Nations Mixed Armistice Commission. In general we were very happy in Ethiopia.

We came to Ethiopia after difficult time in Mozambique. Instead of going to Brazil, we ended up in Ethiopia. Ted was assigned to be the chief commercial officer there, and was supposed to have the former commercial officer's house. Well, lo and behold, we got there and we moved into the house, but a few weeks later we were told to move out because an AID officer outranked my husband and wanted the house. So, with both girls, off we went to our new house, far away from the embassy and the school, across the street from the AGIP gasoline depot, and next door to the slaughterhouse! In fact, our address was #2 Slaughterhouse Road! Not only that, but the girls had to cross train tracks to get to the main road where the school bus picked them up! And here we were, all by ourselves, away from the American community (there was a military attachï¿½ who lived next door to us) because the man from AID outranked my husband by six months or something like that. It demoralizes one, it really does. We are not only talking about Ted; we are talking about the whole family. I mean, here we are, just having taught the children that we are not in Brazil. "Mommy, is this Brazil?" "No, darling, this is Ethiopia." And "Mommy, is this our home?" "No, darling, no, we have to move again." So it was difficult.

Life in the embassy was friendly and pleasant. We made good friends there that we still see today. But I do remember the unreasonable duties the wives were given by the Ambassador's or the DCM wives (or any wife that outranked us); after large embassy parties, we would be asked to stay and count the silver. You see, in Ethiopia, and especially at the Ambassador's residence, there was a large staff. You would think this would be something they could do. We ourselves had a staff of four. And here we were made to stay on and count silver! And another thing: if you talked to any of your friends for more than a minute, some embassy official would come around and say, "Circulate, circulate."

All wives were also expected to be involved in the American Women's club and all its activities. I worked on the yearly "Ethiopian Diary" which we published and sold to local companies and merchants, and I must say, I liked it. There was also an International Women's Club, where the Ethiopian princesses and diplomats' wives from other embassies got together to do good deeds for the local schools, orphanages, etc.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BRYANT: The first two years the Ambassador was Bill Hall. He was a career ambassador. I think he was the inspector general before he came to Addis. I don't think he felt very well while he was in Addis - the altitude or something. His wife was an old Foreign Service wife, very determined, very serious, very demanding, really - but not unpleasant.

But you know, you look back on these things and can't believe some of it. I had two little girls and I was expecting our third. While we entertained a great deal, because we knew a lot of people, I didn't expect anybody in Ted's section to provide food for our parties. On the other hand, when the Ambassador and the DCM entertained at large parties, we were expected to bring dishes.

This is, by the way, where we met and got to know George and Barbara Bush. Bush was the ambassador to the United Nations at the time. The UN sat for a session in Addis Ababa in 1972 and he came for the session. We had met them both in Mozambique at a small dinner party.

Q: Did you have any feel for unhappiness with the Emperor at thatime? He was getting on in years by this time.

BRYANT: No, we all thought that this man was truly admired by his subjects. On the other hand, his son, the Crown Prince, was not popular at all, perhaps because he was not often exposed to the public and had not been given the chance to prove otherwise. What we worried about was that when he died, his son would take over and this could bring unrest in the country. We were so amazed at what finally happened in Ethiopia. He had ruled Ethiopia well for most of the 40 years. He was an old man who didn't know how to change with the times, and unfortunately his advisors did not serve him well.

Q: Well he was essentially ruling from 1913-

BRYANT: -through 1970. So it's 60 years.

Q: So we're talking about 60 years. He was regent, and he went through a couple of permutations, but essentially he was ruling from 1913 on.

BRYANT: And he loved his people, and he actually thought, really-we met the emperor and we knew a lot of his advisors-he actually thought he was doing good things for his people. They had built a wonderful university, very active and very well run. One didn't feel that people were unhappy, one really didn't'; but of course, they must have been.

Q: Well, some may have been. It depends on leadership. It was military coup, essentially, which set up a-

BRYANT: By a sergeant.

Q: -a military dictatorship, quite a brutal one.

BRYANT: Very, very unhappy. And you know, people who visited Ethiopia just at that time told us that the university had been closed, people in the government murdered or arrested and in general a great deal of misery.

Q: And so in '72, where?

BRYANT: In '72 we went to Karachi, Pakistan.

Q: You were there from-

BRYANT: '72 to '75. Karachi was to me like Ouagadougou.In fact, Ouagadougou was more familiar for me because Ted was in African Affairs. Karachi sounded like a horrible assignment.

Q: Bilha, we're off to Karachi. You went to Karachi when?

BRYANT: We went to Karachi in September of '72.

Q: What was Karachi like at that time?

BRYANT: On our way from the airport all we could see was rows of huts and poverty all around us. The road leading to the center was wide and the traffic on it was hundreds of rickshaws, bicycles animals and lots and lots of people-quite terrifying, really. The intent of the wide road leading to the center was to make the city of Karachi appear modern, but they were not quite there yet. But when we arrived downtown to the residential area, the whole impression changed. It was as if the British had never left; big, beautiful houses, with lush gardens and flowers everywhere, beautiful clean streets -it was as if we had stepped into another world. Our own house was gorgeous large house, with beautiful gardens and a large staff to help run it. To think that Karachi sounded so horrible and we dreaded going there and yet it turned out to be one of our best postings in the Service-the Pakistanis were very, friendly and generous people which made life very pleasant, but most important were the wonderful colleagues, wives and even children the Consulate General was blessed with: from the wonderful Consul General, Gordon Tiger, to the marines who became our friends and guardians.

Q: You were there from '72 to what?

BRYANT: '75.

Q: How were relations during that time? Did anything come to sorof intrude on this idyllic life?

BRYANT: At that time, we were tilting toward Pakistan. We had an AID mission, and we were very helpful to them. So nothing actually happened to ruin that sort of idyllic relationship with the Pakistanis. It was hard to see the poverty around us and we tried to help the people around us.

Q: You mentioned you had a houseful of servants. How the devil doeone deal with that?

BRYANT: It's really easy. I found it easy; we all knew that I needed them at least as much as they needed us. Though they fought among themselves once in a while. It was much easier to deal with them since they were all Muslim and knew well the hierarchy. They knew that the bearer would be the main person, and they should take orders from him, rather than from me. So all I had to do was tell the head bearer what I wanted done-how many people were coming for dinner and when. Then I would talk to the cook and decide on the menu. All I had to do for the party is be entertaining and make sure the guests were happy.

Social life in Karachi was very busy and I must say some of it great fun. But at that time we had a small baby Alexi and 2 little girls, Penny and Debbie, who needed care. So we had a nanny for the day and a nanny for the night, with whom I communicated constantly. But the rest of the staff, such the chaukidar (guard), the dhobi (laundryman and the gardener, I left for the head bearer).

Q: During this time, did you run across the Bhuttos?

BRYANT: Yes, but mostly his wife, Nasreen. I think-simply because we knew their Pakistani friends and were invited to their houses, we used to meet them often. The Pakistanis we knew drank a great deal, but they tried to hide that they were drinking alcohol. The women would drink coke all evening, but as the party progressed they would get happier and happier. So one evening I decided to ask how could anybody be that social for such long hours drinking only coke? And so I was told what's in the coke, either rum, gin, or whisky.

Q: Bhutto was considered to be somewhat anti-American at the time.Did you find that at all?

BRYANT: Not socially. But I remember something very interesting and very ironic- Bhutto used to bring his own drinks to parties-not ours, but to other Pakistani parties. He actually brought his own drinks and even water for fear of being poisoned. It was very ironic how he died because he was so worried about-

Q: He was hanged?

BRYANT: Yes. At the time we were actually visiting from New Delhi and having dinner with Pakistani friends, among them politicians and ex-military people. When the radio announced that Bhutto was hanged, there were loud gasps from everyone around the table. Nobody expected that this would actually be done.

Q: What were you getting from your Pakistani contacts about India?

BRYANT: They did not like Indians at all. They really did not trust them as far as they could throw them. That was then, in 1972. When we were in India, at least they had started to talk to each other, but at that time, the relations were really strained. The Pakistanis felt that the Americans were right to be giving them as much aid as we did, since Pakistan was the most westernized and easiest country to deal with in the area; while the Indians, they said, were difficult and inward looking. The civil war in Afghanistan was going on and many Afghani refugees had moved to Peshawar and needed assistance. And if I remember correctly, the Americans were there to help.

Q: This was '72 to '75. The Soviets didn't come into Afghanistauntil '79.

BRYANT: Oh. If I remember correctly they were Soviets in Afghanistan while we were in Pakistan, but they were in civilian cloths. So we must have been in Indi- I'm confusing the times. We traveled a great deal around Pakistan. We went to Peshawar and everywhere, really.

Q: You were there when there was the tilt toward Pakistan?

BRYANT: Yes, and we had a very large mission which included AID, Library of Congress, etc. 250 people worked in the Consulate General, including the local employees. The mission actually had quite a great deal of autonomy, perhaps because of the distance from the Embassy. Though the capital was moved to Islamabad, Karachi remained a very important city, where heads of industries and banks lived. Now I remember something that really brought economic havoc to the country. The Bhutto Government announced the nationalization of all private banks and private industry. It was hard enough for the bureaucracy to run the county, imagine the disaster when they tried to run the banks and industries.

Q: Was the Islamic fundamentalism much of a force when you werthere?

BRYANT: No, not in Karachi in any case. When we were in Peshawar one saw most women wearing "burqas" (face and body covering). If I may generalize, most wealthy women, certainly in the large cities, wore Pakistani shalvar-kameez (pants with long-tail shirts) or beautiful saris but never western clothes. The poorer the women were the more hidden behind the veils they seem to be. Per example, our bearer, whose family lived on the premises, had both his wife and daughter behind burqas. Mind you, his daughter was only 12 year old. Most of our servants stopped everything as the "muezzin" called and went to pray, but I honestly don't recall any of our Pakistani friends praying, and we were close friends. Everyone however observed the month of Ramadan.

Q: You left there in '75. Where did you go?

BRYANT: Since we hadn't been home for a long time, we requested a home assignment. In August '75 we went back to Washington, we got our tenants out of the house. We found proper schools for the girls; we fixed the house, which was in bad repair after years under tenants. The nine months we spent in the States were difficult but we managed to achieve what we needed to and were looking forward to a few quiet years in Washington. And then, Ted came home from the office and announced that we have been posted to Seoul, Korea.

Q: You went to Korea. We were there together. You were in Korea from when?

BRYANT: We arrived to Korea in September of '75.

Q: How did you like Korea?

BRYANT: I did not like Korea very much. I had been living in a gentle society - even Africa was a gentle society. Women were gentle, men were polite and pleasant, and our staff at home was always willing and pleasant. And we came to society that was so very different in every way.

We also had an unfortunate thing happened: Ted came to Seoul to be the Commercial counselor, but when we arrived there he was told that his "predecessor" had decided to extend for two more years and instead he will be running the U.S. Trade Center. Ted is not an outgoing man; he is more of a thinking man. So he was very unhappy with the assignment. But moreover, it started all over again-which house do we get since his job description had changed? Somebody had a little higher grade, or he had been in grade longer than Ted-and here it was: dï¿½jï¿½ vu al over. After long deliberations, we were placed in an old three-bedroom house with narrow wooden staircase leading to the bedrooms. I worried that our 4 year old would fall down the stairs and hurt herself. Later on we were moved to a nice house. So even if I were inclined to like Seoul because of the different culture, this attitude by the powers to be managed to sour me on the whole country.

Q: And nobody would call the Koreans a "gentle" people.

BRYANT: No, you certainly couldn't. I honestly think that the influence of the U.S. Army on the Koreans did not help much in their attitude. Also the English they learned from the Army left much to be desired. I remember sitting next to a prominent Korean businessman at a dinner party, who kept repeating after everything I said "No sweat, Mrs. Bryant."

Since the economy in Korea was improving at the time we were there, we had practically to beg colleagues who had servants to help us find some. As you remember, social life was quite hectic and we did have three young children, so naturally I needed help. I also must admit that I was a bit spoiled after serving in Africa and the sub-continent. You remember the servant situation in Korea. Even when you finally got someone, they definitely worked on their terms.

Our two older girls went to the school on the base, which was not a very good school. Alexi, on the hand, went to a wonderful Montessori school where half the children were Korean and the rest foreigners. There were 26 children in whole. The foreigners paid the tuition for both theirs and the Korean children. This was a wonderful experience for Alexi and she really loved it. She also learned to speak Korean and was very helpful when we shopped in the Korean markets positive.

I am not being fair to include all Koreans in my criticism. We did meet and made friends with some very interesting Koreans. We also liked our colleagues in the Embassy and saw them socially. The country sights were magnificent and we managed to see quite a bit of the country.

Q: Well, then, you went back to India.

BRYANT: Then Ted got a telephone call from personnel that an FSO who was assigned as a commercial counselor in New Delhi did not get a medical clearance and that the Embassy needed someone urgently. Would Ted like that assignment. My gosh, we had been nine months in Washington, we had just settled down in Korea after ten months and things were looking up. Moving again with three children was just horrific. It really was. But I knew Ted was unhappy with his job. We talked it over and decided that Ted should accept. So we packed yet again and went to India.

Q: You were in New Delhi from when to when?

BRYANT: We got to New Delhi in-let's see- June of '77 to June '81.

Q: How did you find New Delhi at this point?

BRYANT: Most people could not believe that we actually loved Karachi and were even more amazed that we wanted to go back to this part of the world. The fact was that Karachi had a wonderful school for the girls, we had really good friends both in the ConGen, especially our Consul General and wife Gordon and Marian Tiger, and among the "natives," we had a wonderful house and we were just happy in Karachi.

So I thought of New Delhi in similar terms. When we arrived to New Delhi during monsoon, we had a house designated for us and ready for occupancy. And we liked the house and the vast garden. The house was actually an old English bungalow, quite large with intricate arrangement of rooms, but charming and comfortable. We actually settled down quite quickly and though the weather was horrendous, we were looking forward to our life there. We'd been there a week or so when one morning the cook called me to ask for something. As we finished discussing the menu for a dinner party in the foyer, since the kitchen was away from the house, and we both left, the whole ceiling of the foyer caved in. I am not exaggerating. Another minute and it could have killed us both. And for the next week I couldn't stop crying. And you know I'm a big, strong woman and I don't cry easily. I was so upset. Mind you, before we got into the house, we were given temporary quarters for three weeks so that they could fix our permanent house. This must have been the straw that broke the camel's back: having had to move three times in two years and then that happens. I must have had a mild nervous breakdown. Monsoon time in New Delhi is difficult as it is: you look out of your air conditioned house at the beautiful green gardens expecting to go out into the fresh air, but instead you go our into 120 heat with 99 humidity.

The embassy in New Delhi was quite large as was the city and the embassy community was dispersed. Perhaps this was the reason that nobody offered to help us, even to show us where the most essential places are.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

BRYANT: Ambassador Goheen, who was in a way an old Indian hand,because his parents had been missionaries in India.

Q: He was from Princeton?

BRYANT: Yes. He was actually the youngest president of PrincetoUniversity. Both the Ambassador and Mrs. Goheen were very nice.

Q: I was wondering whether that set the tone?

BRYANT: Very possibly. Normally somebody at the top says, "Well now, look, we want to make sure that newcomers are shown around and helped to settle down." If no volunteers were available, then make it part of embassy regulations. Archer Blood was DCM, and I think at this point he was not very happy with his career. This again colored the whole atmosphere in the embassy. Once a month Archer Blood gave a reception for all newcomers. If you were to miss his reception, you would have to wait for a month for the next group to arrive. New Delhi was a large city with a large embassy, and you were expected to make your own way, which thanks to having lived before in the sub-continent, we happily did. The ambassador was not very social as well; he was an intellectual and not the life of a party. Since Indian hosts usually served dinner not before 10 p.m., the ambassador accepted few dinner invitations. Indians are extremely hospitable, especially when it comes to important Americans and other foreigners and they cared deeply that we attend their lavish dinners. My Indian friends would often ask me to try and convince the ambassador to accept an invitation promising to serve dinner by 9 p.m. I also remember during dinners at the residence, when Ambassador Goheen would whisper to me, "Bilha, try to get them out of here by ten." But Indians never even arrive until about 10 or later. So socially it wasn't working very well in the embassy. And politically was not much easier: we were still tilting toward Pakistan and the Indians resented it openly. The first thing an Indian will ask me at cocktail parties "How are you, Mrs. Bryant? I understand you have lived in Karachi. How does that compare with New Delhi? You like India better, don't you?" Of course, in my case, I did not like India better; Karachi was friendly, comfortable and life much easier for us. I must admit though that we found India to be one of the most fascinating countries we have ever lived in, much more interesting than Pakistan. In India, wherever you turned, whatever you looked at was history, culture, civilization and even beauty. Since Ted was commercial counselor for all of India, we were able to travel a great deal all over the country. I can't tell you how much we enjoyed this.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Indians? I'm talking about thclass that you were dealing with, I guess the political class.

BRYANT: Well, Indians are intelligent, quick and smart. They are hospitable and friendly, but they are definitely opinionated and quite defensive. As soon as we arrived to India, we met a great number of Indian businessmen and industrialists. They appeared open and easy to talk to provided the subject was agreeable to them. But anything that may be construed as criticism towards India, even complaining about the monsoon, is taken as an insult to the country. I mean, we were very careful when we talked about India's economy or the political system. What I did find, however, was that the women in India were well educated, independent, ambitious, career-oriented and free to pursue their interest. It was certainly not so with Pakistani Muslim women of the same class. Those women were doctors and professors and teachers. They were fascinating to meet socially. But here again the conversation had to be on their term. When we happened to talk about the hard life of Indian women in the villages and I would ask, "Why do you have so many children? I mean, after all, there are now ways to-" the answer was "Oh, but India is such a rich country. There is a lot of food for everybody." Well, of course there was a lot of food for people who lived in certain sections of New Delhi. There was very little food in the poor suburbs of New Delhi and in the villages across India. There was very little room in their small huts for them and their many children. Movies that you see about India are actually very accurate. But Indians will never, never admit there are poor people in India. "We are taking good care of ourselves." Then they bring up the subject of American Blacks and the "terrible" treatment they receive here. In the late '70s and early '80s -maybe things have changed since then-most conversations were controversial, unless we talked about the beautiful saris, wonderful Indian food and of course the music. They have many things to be proud of, but their arrogance overshadows their achievements. It's interesting to compare them with Indians in the United States who contribute to American life in so many ways, from science to food without much fuss. But this is only my humble opinion made while living there for four years and getting to know the people very well. After all, we were out, and I don't exaggerate, every night of the week. We would first go to a cocktail party and then arrive at the dinner party by 9-9:30 still being some of the first guests. Dinner will not be served until midnight.

Q: How does one manage with this?

BRYANT: Not very well, really. I managed by trying to have a nap every day, but poor Ted! It was really very difficult on him because the next morning he had to get up early and go to the office by 8. That's why a lot of our American colleagues drew the line there. They said, "That's all, if they don't serve dinner by 9, we leave." I see pictures of us in India. I tell you we looked very tired, extremely tired. In addition, the weather in India is enervating. There is a very short period of the year when it's really comfortable; by February; New Delhi is already very hot. We had 12 air conditioners in our house, so if the electricity was going we were fine. Beautiful gardens surrounded the house. Because of the water we all had stomach problems quite often in India. You tried to be careful and always drink bottled water, but then the waiters would put a piece of ice in your glass, and that's it.

Q: After this assignment, in '81, what happened?

BRYANT: Well, as many of our colleagues, we parted sadly from the Department of State. Ted had been assigned as commercial counselor to Brasilia, but again, at the last moment, the commercial counselor in Brasilia decided to extend for two more years. Ted learned about this while attending an economic conference in Malaysia and since we had friends there, I decided to join him. In any case, whatever happened during his negotiations with personnel, Ted decided to resign on the spot. Usually, Ted and I discussed all problems and decisions concerning the family. But this time he didn't consult with me at all and I was very, very upset about his decision. We had three young children in grade school and I was still a young woman and not ready for retirement. Ted himself wasn't very old either; he was 55. Instead, without thinking twice, he just resigned. He thought that he would leave the Foreign Service, and with his economic background be able to find a job outside the Service that he would enjoy.

Unfortunately, that was a very hard time for the economy and jobs were scarce. And the worst thing-and this may be interesting for some people to know-was when we found out that while in Korea Ted my had stopped paying our part for health benefits. I don't want to make my husband sound stupid, because he is not. He is rather vague. And nobody in India-in the administration there that had his records-nobody warned him that he was retiring without health benefits, since you have to pay 5 consecutive years into the system before you retire to be able to get the health benefits. They could have suggested that he stay for another year in the Department and then leave with proper benefits. Nobody told him. My husband retired in India-he didn't even retire in the United States-and we came back, and I said, "Oh, we have to organize our health, and all those things. What are we going to do?" And he said, "Oh, we don't have health coverage." I said, "What!" He said, "Oh, Bilha, we can afford it; we have enough money to pay for our coverage." I was beside myself. We had three children and my mother living with us, and he was saying, we can pay for ourselves! You see, the trouble was that I didn't know much about these things; I was just a wife. So instead of yelling and screaming I decided to take matters into my own hands and went to talk to the appropriate person in the State Department to see whether something could be done. The answer was that nothing could be done because this is the law.

So a thought struck me that I may be able to get a job with State and I just walked into the Office of Personnel in European Affairs and asked for a job. "What can you do," they asked. I said, "Well, I was a Foreign Service officer. I'm really quite capable. I can do something." And they said, "Can you type?" and I said, "Yes." (though I actually didn't type too well). Now here I am, the wife of a Foreign Service officer, and until recently a "lady of leisure", an expert in moving and entertaining, accepting a job as a temp secretary/typist. I asked if I could get a permanent job with benefits and the answer was: "Not until positions open up." In any case, to cut a long story short, I learned how to type, and on the day of the test took a Valium and was able to type the required 40 words a minute. The Soviet Bureau was desperate for clerical help and I was sent there.

Q: This would be in-: '82?

BRYANT: And so I started working the following week, but I warned the Office Director that since I have three relatively young children, I could only work part time and he agreed. I didn't type very fast, but I was very conscientious and hard working. I was willing to help anyone that needed help, and they let me help; sometime it would be xeroxing or distributing papers, but more often than not they would ask me to respond to letters or telephone calls seeking information about the Soviet Union. I also learned to use the "Wang". To the relief of the busy officers, I started taking over some of their work. They were so pleased that they wrote to Personnel asking that I'd be hired as a permanent secretary to the Director, despite the fact that I didn't want to work more than three or four days a week. And so I got a permanent job with health benefits that covered all of us, and so we are fine. I worked in the State Department for 11 years.

Q: Let's talk about the time that you were there, because there waa progression, wasn't there?

BRYANT: Yes, definitely.

Q: How did this work?

BRYANT: Well, you know, I didn't realize that I was ambitious. I had forgotten my earlier career and all that, because I was enjoying being a wife of a FSO and bringing up children. But when I started working, the old ambitious Bilha reappeared. I would look at the young Foreign Service officers, who were really just beginning, and I'd think to myself, "I know I could do that." My English was quite good, especially my written English. And of course it was 1982, with everything happening in the Soviet Office. Everyone was working long hours into the night. The Jewish "refuseniks" immigration question was being raised often by visiting U.S. dignitaries to then Soviet Union and lists had to be prepared and letters to be written. I was given the job and did it for a couple of years. As relations improved and we started having cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union, I went to work for this section within the same office, and then I moved on.

Q: While you are dealing with Jewish immigration affairs, did the Israeli embassy or any Jewish groups say, "Aha, we have a friend in court" and go after you?

BRYANT: Having upset Ambassador Hall in Ethiopia because of my friendly relations with Israeli diplomats, whom I had known before I became an American, I really kept my distance from the Israelis in Washington, and that's the honest truth. I did not know anybody in the Israeli Embassy and with the name of Bryant I don't think they knew who I was.

It was very ironic to see diplomacy in action: Both the U.S. and the Israeli governments were arguing over every Soviet Jew, especially someone like Sharansky and other Jews of his caliber. The Israelis wanted as many Soviet Jews as possible to increase the European population in Israel and somehow culturally balance things. Eventually Sharansky himself chose to go to Israel. The irony is that Sharansky, whom they wanted so badly, has become ultra-conservative and is now a thorn in any Labor government. He's no longer the liberal Russian; he is a supporter of the Likud party and openly proclaims his hate and intolerance toward the Arabs. So the Israelis really did not do very well by getting Sharansky and his kind to Israel. So I did keep away from the Israeli embassy, definitely.

Q: During the time you were working on the refuseniks, how did wwork on that? What did we do?

BRYANT: We presented to the Soviet Government long lists of names of Soviet Jews who wanted to emigrate. In fact, every time Secretary Shultz met with high-level Soviet officials, he would insist that the Soviets find fifteen minutes time to discuss the emigration of Soviet Jews. The Soviets would look through the lists and let few refuseniks out. It had become a principal for the Soviets not to succumb to our demands and to bargain about them. I actually felt that had we not pushed as hard, more Soviets Jews might have left since they had become a nuisance for the regime. The few that were able to leave were cared for by Jewish organizations that helped them settle either here or in Israel.

Q: Did you get any feeling that within the Soviet office there was concern that we had other things to deal with besides immigration from the Soviet Union? And usually these things are pretty quid-pro-quo, and so if you insist on one thing you are expending negotiating capital.

BRYANT: Well, I must say that there were indeed so many more important things happening at that time that the political officers in the Soviet office could not invest a lot of time in this and considered it more as a gesture toward the American-Jewish community rather than an important policy issue. The political officers themselves were very unhappy with the travel restrictions and such that were imposed on Soviet diplomats in the States and especially their UN staff, as a bargaining point for free emigration. The political officers in the bureau were unhappy with the arrangement, since travel restrictions were imposed on our diplomats in the Soviet Union as well. They also thought at the time there were far more important issues between the two countries. So it was difficult. I can't tell you how devoted and hardworking those officers were. They were at the office all the time. It was hard on me also because I said I'd work three days a week, and I found myself working almost every day and late hours and all that, but it was an exciting experience because it allowed me do interesting jobs that mattered. I learned so much about the Soviet Union.

Q: You were dealing with refuseniks from sort of when to when?

BRYANT: I think for about a year but I don't remember.

Q: And this was when Reagan was calling the Soviets the "evil empire" and all this. It was a right-wing Republican administration. Did you feel that where you were?

BRYANT: Very much so, except that I thought Shultz was a wonderful Secretary of State. He was a moderate Republican. He was also a man who surrounded himself and took advise from Foreign Service officers. He did listen and he did try to influence Reagan. He didn't have much influence because wasn't Weinberger then the Secretary of Defense?

Q: Yes.

BRYANT: So that was a difficult period for sure. Weinberger was very close to the President and had strong opinions on the Soviet Union. But people on the Soviet Desk knew they had the support of the Secretary and found working for him very rewarding. These officers had first class minds, deep knowledge of the Soviet Union, many of whom had lived there and yet nobody ever guessed what was coming, none of them. It was incredible.

Q: Well, you moved over. Where did you move to then after you lefthe refuseniks?

BRYANT: Well it was the same office. Then I worked for the cultural exchange people for less than a year. At this point there were so many Congressional letters on the Soviet Union piling up on the officers' desks that I suggested to the director, who was a good friend-

Q: Who was the director?

BRYANT: Jim Shumaker. Later Shumaker left to become Consul General in Leningrad. Louis Sell replaced him. Louis asked if I would mind answering some of the hundreds of congressional letters and I agreed. In any case, then I became the congressional specialist for the Soviet Desk. I answered letters on the Refuseniks, on food shortages and many more issues that I honestly don't remember any more. It covered each and every political and economic issue we had with the Soviets at that time. Of course, I would write the letters and then clear them with the appropriate officers. I would write, type and pack the letters according to the extreme bureaucratic demand of H. So I became a specialist on Congressional letters.

Q: Why would Congress be writing you letters?

BRYANT: In fact, constituents would write to their Senator or Congressman on a variety of issues that concern them, including at the time issues on the Soviet Union. They would write on behalf of constituents urging the emigration of certain refuseniks, complaining about why are we helping the Soviets and sometimes why are we not helping them and most often and most urgently concerns about human rights in the Soviet Union. At this point I can't remember all the issues, but I do remember that some of the letters about the human rights situation were involved and complex, requiring detailed responses as to what is the USA doing to alleviate the suffering, etc.-I mean, really, three or four page letters. So here I became the Congressional specialist. By the way, every summer I was able to take two month off and go to Massachusetts with the family. Eager young interns who were interested in the Foreign Service would replace me. One year, while the Director was a way, the Deputy told me that I could not take my usual "summer vacation." And I left the office. Of course, when I returned they still hadn't find a replacement for me and wanted me back, but I didn't agree. And I decided to go and work for H.

Q: H being Congressional Relations.

BRYANT: Congressional Relations. And this was probably my worst experience in the State Department. It was the Correspondence Division, and so 12 women, all GS-9 to 12, sat gossiping about each other and really hating each other-terrible. We had prepared language for all the letters we wrote. That means that I will get a pile of letters and instead of composing the responses I would fill out forms that say: use paragraphs 1, 7, and 9 and pass them on to the secretaries for typing.

Q: It was a mindless job.

BRYANT: Mindless. I mean, a secretary could do that. Why pay a GS-9 and 11s to do that sort of work? Well, I could not stand the job and the atmosphere in the office and decided to look out for something else. So one day while I was having lunch with a friend, an officer, complaining about my horrible job he said, "Hey, I have a job for you. Eastern Europe wants somebody like you. They are overwhelmed with work. Why don't you come and meet the director?"

Q: This would be about when?

BRYANT: May of '85. And so I went to see the director of Easter European Affairs, Jim Swihart, who was a nice, soft-spoken man. We talked for a while and he told me that he really wants me to work for the office. When I told him of my "working conditions, working 3 to 4 days and going to Rockport in the summer, he said, "I don't care. When you come back, you start work here. Bilha, please start work here." And in September, I started. That was '85-or was it '86? I think it was '86. The office dealt with Romania, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Albania. Things were happening in all these countries in varying degrees, and you could feel it in the air. Being Bulgarian myself, everything about this part of the world seemed familiar. So I was very happy. The Director and his deputy were both wonderful and set the tone for the whole office. The officers were great. I had an interesting job. I had a title. I got promoted.

Q: What was your basic job?

BRYANT: I was the public affairs officer. I really loved this job, and I worked four days a week rather than three. I worked well with the officers and when things started happening we were all extremely busy but honestly quite happy. Then, you know, revolution in Poland with Walesa and in Romania with-what was his name?-

Q: Ceausescu.

BRYANT: Ceausescu. Even Bulgaria started moving out of thdarkness. It was the most exciting time for me.

Q: You were doing this from when to when?

BRYANT: I did that until I retired. I started in '86 in Eastern Europe and a lot of changes happened while I was there, you know, new directors, new officers and new countries, but I continued to be very happy.

Q: Now, you retired when?

BRYANT: I retired in December '94.

Q: How well prepared did you find the place? We're really talkinabout, all hell broke lose in '89, and particularly in Eastern Europe.

BRYANT: Nobody was prepared to what actually happened.

Q: Was there any feeling there that this guy Gorbachev and the Soviet Union seem to be heading off on a course that may loosen the ties with the Soviet Union with these Eastern European countries?

BRYANT: Nobody guessed until the fall of Ceausescu. No, Poland was before that. Ceausescu was '89. Poland was '87 or '88 beginning with the strikes in Gdansk. We were all very excited, not as much about Walesa-and you have to bear with me because names have disappeared-but about the very intelligent very articulate man that was his prime minister for a while. The Department was trying so much to really support him, but the political system in Poland did not work quite as we expected. Walesa and his people were the winners. Nobody expected things to move as fast and we were all overwhelmed. The officers hardly went home; there was so much to do. But looking on the positive side, we were all extremely happy with the way the changes in Poland occurred. It was a peaceful revolution and it became an example to the rest. Economic help followed immediately. We knew they would know what to do with it.

I remember working on the President's visit to Poland, which was very interesting. I actually wrote a detailed scenario for the President. Not having been to Warsaw, I was still able, with information from officers who have lived there, to write in detail what Warsaw looked like, what stops the President will make and where, etc.

Q: Was there any concern that when things started moving in Polanthe Soviets might move in.

BRYANT: Yes, for the first few months, people were really considering what should be done in case the Soviets decided to interfere. But Gorbachev not only did not interfere, but also gave some leeway to their former satellites. As soon as this happened, the Poles, the Czechoslovaks and the Hungarians took the ball and ran with it. I must say, there was so much going on in all of Eastern Europe and all at the same time that it's hard for me to remember details.

Q: As sort of the press person, there is the State Department press spokesperson, and what was the connection? I mean, these things were happening fast.

BRYANT: I can tell you. First thing when we arrived to the office, would be the press release. I will collect the information and draft the press release in very short sentences. Then it will go to the desk officer in charge of the country where it was happening. He'll make changes and give it back to me. I'll make the changes and bring it to the deputy director. He would look at it. He was a very relaxed, a great guy.

Q: Who was he?

BRYANT: Jim Hooper. Great guy. Then Jim would say, "Just take it over to Jim" or whoever was in charge at the time. Jim would fuss with it a little, not too much and then the press release would go up to the office of our Assistant Secretary for European Affairs and at least 10 people would fuss with that there. I am speaking of a press release of perhaps 10 lines or even less. And then it will go to the Assistant Secretary himself. The document will end up on my desk after every addition/correction. And so, by the time it got to the Press Office, there was very little remaining from what I had written, except for the actual facts. So that's what happened. And for all we knew, the Press Office might have changed it also. Then we'll receive the final version, and we'll file it, and the next day it will start all over again.

Q: An awful lot of cooks on this particular soup.

BRYANT: And they really worried about every word. "Oh, don't say that, because that might look promising. Don't say that because that might sound negative."

Q: Did you have Eastern Germany?

BRYANT: No. But here is where I want to say something. It was so interesting to see that certain racism shows it's claws everywhere. In this case it was between being a "real European" or not. At that time everything was being done for Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. I know because I worked with the economic assistance groups outside the Department of State and read all the constituents' letters urging more and more assistance. And here were the poor southern cousins, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania completely neglected, I mean, truly. After all, not too many constituents would be interested in these countries. And being Bulgarian myself I especially felt it. Nothing, or practically nothing was being done. It was very interesting to see the office of Eastern European Affairs spiritually split in two. By the way, later as I understand it, the office was actually divided to Northern and Southern Affairs, because it got to the point where the officers of Southern Europe insisted that something be done for the countries they represented. What else was very, very interesting? I was going to mention it. I lost my thought.

Q: Poland had been kind of out there somewhat different anyway:

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: They had never quite gotten rid of the Catholic Church, and you know, things had been happening. You actually had a labor movement. But then going to Czechoslovakia, where, after the Prague Spring of 1968, I mean, this is a very repressive regime.

BRYANT: And in Hungary, where after...

Q: Yes, after '56...

BRYANT: Yes, there was really blood on the streets.

Q: Was there any feeling that these places were going to...did thicatch everybody by surprise, because they went rather quickly?

BRYANT: They caught everybody by surprise not because this was not expected, but because of the speed things happened. In Czechoslovakia they called it the "velvet revolution." Vaclav Havel had been in contact with our embassy for some time so he was a known quality. And the embassy had been reporting that things would work well in Czechoslovakia. But Hungary-nobody was very positive about Hungary, and as it happened they were right. During the country's first elections, ex-Communists were elected as Prime Minister and President. It was amazing how little we guessed and yet how well the officers were prepared, under the circumstances. I mean, so much had happened and in such short time, and yet these officers were able to handle the situation, and handle it quite successfully.

Q: Was there sort of a sense of running around and saying, "Omigod, something is happening in Czechoslovakia. What can we do?" And running around, I mean, in Washington.

BRYANT: Definitely. Plenty of running around, not knowing how to go about certain things. Wisely in many cases they asked advice from Americans of Polish, Hungarian and Czechs decent who were knowledgeable about these countries and who got involved earnestly in improving conditions in their former homelands. With all the different issues and diverse personalities involved, the situation somehow never got chaotic. It was dealt efficiently and well, considering that everyday something unexpected would happen.

Q: What about what was happening in Romania, the fall of Ceausescu?

BRYANT: The Romanian desk officer was a very good officer, but even he didn't imagine what actually would happen. What people in the office expected was that the new Romanian regime would let Ceausescu go to the Soviet Union, but in all probability his people will be running the country. They would start slowly toward democracy and eventually economic reforms. We really can't get credit for what happened next in Romania. All credit goes to the starving miners who seized the moment during their big strike. And here again it was a big surprise to our officers. Except for Bulgaria, Romania was one of the most devoted Communist countries in Eastern Europe and, in my humble opinion; we didn't handle Romania very well and the reason was that we were not veryinterested in handling Romania very well.

Q: And Bulgaria was just not on the radar.

BRYANT: Not even that. We did almost nothing for those poor brave Bulgarian people, who were struggling to get rid of the Soviets and needed all the help they could get. We just handled the situation very badly. The fact was that we didn't need anything from Romania or Bulgaria. Bulgaria didn't have a large community with influence in the States and most Romanians in the U.S. are Gypsies. Only the Gypsies' Association was writing letters urging assistance to Romania, which I found amusing. On the other hand we did have a huge Polish community; In Chicago there are almost as many Poles as in Warsaw. The Polish-Americans had a great influence and they knew it. They wanted things done for Poland and demanded that things be done immediately. It was ironic, I thought, that while they urged the government to help Poland, they wrote letters to State demanding that the U.S. Government help them recover their nationalized houses in Poland. And who would pay for that? The Polish Government, of course.

Q: When you are moving into this, the real thing in a way shifteover rather quickly into Yugoslavia.

BRYANT: Very quickly indeed. This job for me became the most important and stressful work I have ever done. I remained the public affairs officer for Eastern Europe, but really most of my work revolved around Yugoslavia. At that point, the three central European countries were being reorganized into another office. There was nothing happening in Bulgaria. Romania quieted down; except for the Romanian orphans issue also took a lot of my time. Americans are kind hearted and love children. And when they read in the papers about the tragic situation, everybody wanted to adopt a Romanian orphan. But then when the Romanian orphans started trickling into the U.S., the adoptive parents realized how sick those kids were - many had AIDS also - there came the letters and the pleas for help. This was a large and complex project I had to carry.

When I finished with this project I moved to the Yugoslav desk. Then it all started. I am not a great political scientist-but even I knew that we were handling the problems of Yugoslavia badly. I remember writing letters for the signature of President Bush, which showed in no uncertain terms the indecision and flip-flopping of the administration on the issue. If we had put our foot down there and then and shown Serbia our determination to prevent the conflict, we would have saved 200,000 people who died for nothing and a lot more misery for everyone in the country.

Q: Did you get a feel for why we were doing it that way?

BRYANT: What we kept saying was it's really none of our business since these people had been fighting for something or another throughout history. This was wrong. During the 50 or so years of Communist regime, the people of Yugoslavia lived in peace, in the same neighborhoods or small villages. They intermarried and had children, so it possible for them to live peacefully. And we kept saying, and I remember I kept writing it over and over again, "The people of Yugoslavia have fought for the last 500 years, and they fought over Kosovo, etc. We do not want to get involved."

Q: How were the officers dealing with Yugoslavia on this?

BRYANT: The officers who knew Yugoslavia wanted us to do something to prevent what came next. Our ambassador in Belgrade, Warren Zimmerman, whom I liked very much, wanted us to really slap the wrist of Milosevic. He wrote many letters to Congress and other organizations giving examples of Milosevic's politics, and urging the U.S. Government to do something about this man. He rightly predicted that Milosevic would make havoc in Yugoslavia." But nobody seemed to listen and I don't honestly know why.

I must say, I really had a great deal of admiration Deputy Secretary Eagleburger who had served as a third secretary and an Ambassador to Yugoslavia and I've written a lot of letters that he signed without much fuss or too many changes. Yet, Eagleburger insisted that these people (the Yugoslavs) hate each other and will kill each other at any opportunity. "We cannot and should not help." The Europeans were reluctant as well; worrying that all the refugees from the conflict will end up in their countries. The charitable organizations were the only ones who got involved, by providing food and shelter to the affected population, but couldn't of course stop the fighting.

Q: Did you sense, as things developed, the siege of Sarajevo, thmassacre at Srebrenica, and on?

How were these things hitting you?

BRYANT: It had become a very difficult place to work. All of us on the Yugoslav Desk were very, very unhappy that after all our hard work, we couldn't stop the bloodshed. We were faced daily with reports describing in details the massacres of innocent people that occurred in many places. I remember reading about 16 or 17 Bosnians who got on a train for Sarajevo and never arrived there. Later on their bodies were found in a mass grave. We had to read the reports about the terrible rapes and just horrible situations-a young Muslim woman in Sarajevo who was raped by Serbs not being able to tell her parents about it not to bring shame on the family. And with all of that going on, we sat there and wrote platitudes. We are the most powerful nation in the world. If we had said to Milosevic, "Stop it. If not, we will drop a bomb in the middle of Belgrade"-just say it, don't do it. But we kept saying we would not get involved. Milosevic is a bully, and we all knew he was a bully. You have to use different tactics with a bully and yet we treated him like a normal man.

Q: There were several resignations, I think three men who werworking there. Did that have any effect?

BRYANT: Three young men. I was working very closely with them. That was very sad because they were good officers and brilliant young men. One of them actually worked for the Secretary before he came to the desk. I though they all had very, good reasons to resign. I remember doing the press release and giving it for clearance to one of the officers-they were working then on Sarajevo. He would look at it carefully make some small changes and say: "Great, this sounds good. It is strong." I had become very ego-involved in the conflict and liked the approval of my direct superiors. But then the press release might not even come back to our office, but we would listen to the press conference and realize that nothing was left of our original document. We were very upset, disappointed and demoralized.

Q: Was it coming from the State Department up above, or was it thWhite House?

BRYANT: I really think it was coming from the White House, but Stathad a lot to do with it.

Q: Tell me something. You were there. I got the impression-and please correct me or explain it-but his spokesperson was Margaret Tutwiler, and I had the feeling that Bush had a coterie about him, led by Margaret Tutwiler, who were mainly out to make sure that Baker looked good for a future presidential run. And you know, secretaries of state are the people who have to deal with bad news, and they had better not start worrying about how they look and start worrying about policy. Did you have that feeling?

BRYANT: I am afraid you are right. One of the things we kept hearing about our possible involvement in Yugoslavia was, "We get involved, and when the first Americans come back in bags, then we'll have hell to pay." And Baker did not want that; he wanted the pure image of an American patriot. And I am afraid the public opinion was very much the same. Hundreds of people would call the desk and ask that we do something for the people of Yugoslavia, but as soon as you mention sending our military to help, the tone of support would change. "I hope you're not going to send anybody to Yugoslavia to fight and die." So it was not an easy decision for the President and the Secretary to make. Maybe it's only the way I felt, but the work continued to be hard and the morale was getting lower and lower, and I thought, I don't want to be here any longer.

Q: Good time to go.

BRYANT: Yes, I didn't want to be there any longer. I have good memories and I was wise to do this job and stay for as long as I did. I was even wiser to leave when I left.

Q: Well, why don't we stop at this point?

End of interview